

ILLUSTRATING CLOUDS

BY HEIDI EITREIM



Sometimes the nature that surrounds us feels flat. We're almost blind to the plants we've grown up with, and we don't even see the trees anymore. Maybe our pines and maples just don't seem to compare to the palms or Joshuas we northerners long to experience.

But what about the clouds? Do we think to look up and take in the cotton candy wisps of cirrus, or the ombre' blue-hued giants after a storm? What I love about the clouds is that they are ever changing. They add texture, movement, and character to an otherwise, monotonous sky, no matter what part of the country you find yourself in. And the best part is that we all get a fantastic view of them, if we'd only look up. Clouds are said to be nature's poetry, so let's get our heads in the clouds and create.





SUPPLIES

- Graphite pencil and eraser
- Watercolor pencils
- Watercolor paintbrushes (multiple sizes)
- Gouache - white
- Painters tape
- Water cup

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before we begin drawing or start laying down any pigment, we are going to create a border for our piece by taping off the edges of our page. No matter what size paper you are starting with, a white border will help in creating a focal point for your final image. I've created crop marks at the corners of where I want my image to lie on the page. Then I just line up my painters' tape with those marks. Alternately, you can use the edge of your paper and set the tape down just inside those edges to create an even, one-inch border.
2. The next step is to begin your line drawing. There are many types and variations of clouds, but my favorite has got to be the bulging cumulonimbus—the kind you see in the summertime after a good storm. Even better is when that heavenly light shines from behind its contrasting, pillowy perfection. Do a little research in books or online to find images to inspire the shape and color you want in creating this piece.

Once you have determined your design, create your cloud composition by laying out your pencil drawing on the page. A horizontal composition works best for me because of the way I envision the light striking out from behind the tops of clouds. Your pencil drawing is the most important step, so do not short cut this step or skip it. Your final outcome will only be as good as your line drawing. Getting your proportions and perspectives right is only going to enhance the overall outcome of your picture.





3. When you have finalized your pencil drawing, you are ready to add some pigment. Let's start with the blue sky. We're going to lay down a light blue throughout the background, but before we add water, layer a bit more pigment in certain areas of the background that appear darker, like the edges of our composition and the areas directly outlining those puffy clouds. I like to layer a darker blue on top of the layers of light blue I've already used. This helps to give richness to an otherwise flat sky.

Then take a small brush and add water, working from the edge of our clouds out, with short, soft strokes. We want the majority of our pigment to stay right close to the clouds. Then with a larger brush and more water, let's mix the rest of our blues, being careful to leave the deeper blues where they are.

It's easy to drag the extra pigment around and lose it, so make sure to add extra water to keep the lightest parts light. It may take a few attempts, but there is nothing wrong with adding more layers until you get your desired look. Just don't push too hard with your colored pencils, otherwise the blending will not come as easily.



4. After you've gotten a good start on the sky, you want to take those same blues and lay down some color in the clouds. There will be slight variations in color from sky to clouds, but I like to marry sections of my work because I think it gives a cohesive look. Start with the same blues of the sky, but then add a little more warmth with some lavender and purple. This is also where you want to pay special attention to texture, using short, circular strokes.

When there are small, deep pockets of color, instead of using my colored pencil right on the surface of the paper, sometimes I take the color directly from the tip of my pencil. This is a way I've found that I can add some deeper tones quickly.

5. For the lighter parts of the cloud, you'll notice I'm not laying down any color with my pencils. I'm usually just dragging the pigment from those darker spots and adding more water to dilute the color for the light spots. Pay close attention to the areas of light and shadows. Yes, even clouds have shadows!

How many colors do you see? Don't get hung up using just one or two. Challenge yourself to use a handful of blues, warm and cool ones. Be patient and continue layering and mixing. I'm going back into my sky to include some deep purple around the edges of the clouds because I want that to be emphasized a bit more, and I think it needs the warmth.





6. Next step is the gorgeous light I want to show peaking out from behind the clouds, as well as the rest of the highlights. To start this process, I'm actually going to deepen certain areas of the sky instead of adding light. Once I'm happy with the blending of those deep shadowy areas, I take my white gouache and a large brush to add the beams of streaming light. Feel free to drag it right off the page. Your painters' tape will give a nice crisp edge.

Next move to the clouds and look for the highlights—those whitest whites. That's where we're going to lay down some heavier gouache with a smaller brush. To get a more opaque white, do not add much water. Continue to work the highlights in your clouds, as you experiment with different amounts of water. I like to go back and forth between the sky and clouds, blending whites and deepening blues, in order to create a balance between the two. Again, just be patient and play with it. If an area gets too light, simply add another layer of pigment.

7. Usually to finish up a piece I use my little black pen, but not this time. We don't want harsh lines in our clouds. Adding a touch more color, one or two of our deeper tones, to define all those broken cloud edges will be enough.

8. Then the final step is to remove the painters' tape. This is the big reveal! Watch your cloud pop off the page!

There is a spectacular display of nature happening right above you. Don't miss out. Get outside and look up!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hi There! My name is Heidi. I'm currently a stay-at-home homeschool mom, in our fifth year. I had big plans of returning to the working world when all four of my kiddos were of school age, but God had other plans. He changed my heart and mind, but some days I still struggle with obedience. I'm passionate about living for Jesus, and I believe that starts in our hearts and our home. I like rich, dark coffee and delicious chocolate cake. I appreciate humor, authenticity, and all things outdoors. If I didn't have to haul four kiddos and their very large instruments, I would ride my bike everywhere. I have a BA in art, with an emphasis in graphic design, and I recently reignited my passion for drawing and illustrating when I started teaching my children how to keep a nature journal.

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